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House Panel Criticizes Pentagon On Political Killings in Vietnam

WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 (UPI)—A House of Representatives subcommittee has criticized the Pentagon for not investigating possible war crimes by United States soldiers taking part in a program of political assassination in South Vietnam.

The subcommittee report, obtained by United Press International, said it was possible that many of the more than 20,000 suspected Vietcong killed under the program known as Phoenix were actually innocent civilians who were victims of faulty intelligence.

The private report of the House Foreign Operations and Government Information Subcommittee, based on a field trip to South Vietnam and hearings held over a two-year period, questioned "the serious moral considerations of U.S. support for a program that has allegedly included torture, murder and inhumane treatment of South Vietnamese civilians."

Such charges, said the report, were "unofficially called to the attention of a high-ranking Defense Department official in a staff conference [but] there has been no effort by D.O.D. to pursue the serious charges."

"These charges should be either substantiated or repudiated after an impartial and thorough investigation," the report said.

Testimony by Ex-Agent

The charges cited by the subcommittee were based mostly on testimony by K. Barton Osborn, an American who worked as an intelligence agent in the phoenix program.

He testified before the subcommittee that reconnaissance units sent out to find Vietcong suspects "had the primary mission of assassinations." From his experience, he said, suspects who were captured were either tortured to death or thrown from helicopters, frequently by American soldiers.

The Phoenix program, started in 1968, was organized to identify members of the Vietcong and to "neutralize" them through death or imprisonment.

Mark T. Colby, a diplomat who served as a political officer in Saigon and had responsibility for overseeing the Phoenix program, told the subcommittee that it was "not a program of assassination" and that, except in a few instances, the suspects were killed only when they resisted arrest.

But Mr. Osborn, under questioning by the subcommittee chairman, William S. Moorhead, Democrat of Pennsylvania, and Representative Paul N. McCloskey, Republican of California, testified in July, 1971, that he had seen civilians thrown from helicopters by United States soldiers to scare other suspects into admitting that they were members of the Viet Cong forces.

The former agent also said

he had seen Americans slowly starve a woman to death and that some suspects had had rods slowly tapped into their ears until their brains were penetrated.

He said that Americans "knew unofficially" it was preferable to kill suspects rather than go through the "administrative problems and procedure" of detaining them.

Citing "serious questions" about the Phoenix program, the subcommittee said: "It was developed during the hearings that the use of 'quotas' and the 'targeting' of Vietcong suspects is often based on faulty intelligence, sometimes supplied by individuals having ulterior motives."

The report said that, according to official figures, 20,587 suspected Vietcong agents were killed from 1968 through May, 1971.

Documents Are Exchanged

They watched as Mr. Nixon, Mr. Gromyko and Secretary of State William P. Rogers signed and exchanged the necessary documents placing the two agreements into force.

The more important of the two accords is a treaty limiting each side up to 200 defensive missiles, 100 at each of two sites. One of each country's sites could be around its capital, and the other around an offensive missile site.

The second was a five-year interim agreement putting numerical limits on each side's land and submarine offensive missiles. By the terms of the accord, the Russians will have a numerical wedge in missiles but the United States maintains superiority in the number of multiple missile warheads.

In a ceremony on Saturday, Mr. Nixon signed a Congressional resolution expressing support for the interim accord. But that agreement did not formally go into effect until today's action.



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Kerry Favored in Poll
BOSTON, Oct. 3 (AP)—John F. Kerry, the antiwar Democrat, holds a 2-to-1 lead over Paul W. Cronin, Republican, in the Fifth Congressional District race, according to a poll conducted for the Boston Globe.

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